



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The 'Owl and the Nightingale': Five new readings and further notes

Citation for published version:

Laing, M 2007, 'The 'Owl and the Nightingale': Five new readings and further notes', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, vol. 108, no. 3, pp. 445-477. <<http://www.helsinki.fi/jarj/ufy/publications.htm>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Neuphilologische Mitteilungen

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE:
FIVE NEW READINGS AND FURTHER NOTES¹

0. Introduction

It is generally accepted that the two surviving copies (C and J)² of the 13th-century debate poem, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, are closely related, and that they go back to a lost common exemplar, X. It is also recognised that the two scribes of C and J differed markedly in their approach to their exemplar. The C scribe was a literatim copyist, as is evidenced by the two distinct types of language, C1 and C2, that alternate in his text. These distinct types were faithfully transmitted, it is assumed, from X, where the two types may have been the work of two different scribes. The J scribe, by contrast, is a translator by habit, as is evidenced by his text of *The Owl and the Nightingale* being in one homogeneous kind of language, different from both C1 and C2, and matching the usage of all the other texts in the manuscript he copies. As well as translating the language of his exemplar into his own preferred usage, the J scribe takes a freer editorial approach to the text of the poem than does the C scribe. He frequently adapts his copy where he finds textual difficulties, much as a modern editor might emend a faulty reading.³ The C scribe's habit of literatim copying predisposes him to a faithful rendering of what he (thinks he) sees in his exemplar, whether or not it always makes clear sense.⁴ C is therefore the 'better' copy, in that it is closer to the version in X, and therefore also, by definition, closer to the original than the more freely treated J. For this reason, those editors who have not elected to present the two surviving versions in parallel, have chosen C as their base text, and prefer C's readings, in almost all instances, to those of J.

¹ These observations arise from detailed analytical work on early Middle English manuscript texts being undertaken at the Institute for Historical Dialectology, Linguistics and English Language, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh towards the compilation of A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English (*LAEME*). This research project was supported from 2000–2006 by AHRC for which gratitude is here expressed. I am grateful to Eric Stanley, whose splendidly detailed 1960 edition first led me, as a student, to a love of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, and to Neil Cartlidge, both for his important and hugely useful new edition, and for his tireless erudition during extensive e-mail discussions of the poem between 1998 and 2000 that made me realise how much more there was (and is) to know about it. I thank Derek Britton, Roger Lass and Keith Williamson for useful comments and Philip Bennett and Glynn Hesketh for comments and help with Anglo French.

² C = British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ix and J = Oxford, Jesus College MS 29.

³ There is general agreement about the J scribe's editorial independence among editors of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Atkins 1922: xxvii; Gratton and Sykes 1935: xvi; Hall 1920: II, 553; Stanley 1960: 6).

⁴ For a fuller account, with references, of this received view, see Cartlidge (2001: xl–xliv); see also Stanley (1960: 6) and cf. Laing, (1998: 276–278).

1. The problem at line 1322

1.1. Transmission

Many of the textual cruces in *The Owl and the Nightingale* arise in places where there is disagreement between the two surviving versions; and it is not difficult to see why. An error, lacuna or lack of orthographic clarity in X would cause difficulty to both copyists but provoke a different response in each. The C scribe's habitual reaction would be to stick as closely as possible to the imperfect text in front of him. The J scribe's strategy would be to find some way of making sense of the text, as long as the solution was reasonably faithful to metre and rhyme-scheme. A textual disagreement between C and J therefore signals a problem in the exemplar and potential difficulties for the modern reader or editor. Sometimes, however, the modern reader or editor has had difficulties even where C and J agree textually. One such example is at line 1322 and the problem reading is the word *bi-haitest*.

Lines 1321–4 of the C version (in Language C2) are:

Hpat canstu wrecche þing of storre .
 Bute þ þu bi-haitest hi feorre .⁵
 Alspo deþ mani dor & man .
 þeo of hspucche napiht ne con .

The J version reads:

hwat constu wrcche þing of storie .
 Bute þ þu bi-haitest hi ferre .
 Also doþ mony deor and man .
 þeo of suyche nowiht ne can .

These couplets are part of a harangue by the Nightingale in response to the Owl's previous boast that she is an expert prognosticator of human woes and disasters (lines 1189 ff.). The owl claims this ability because she is wise and knows all about the art of divination (*Ich pat al of þe tacninge* line 1213). The Nightingale insists that the owl must therefore be a witch (line 1301), because the only way otherwise of attaining the power of divination would be through being versed in astrology (*storre wis* line 1318). In the Nightingale's opinion the owl has no such knowledge. The couplet above may be translated: 'What dost thou know, wretched thing, about stars, except that thou [*bi-haitest*] them afar? So doth many a beast and man, who knows nothing of such things'. The word *bi-haitest* is not recorded elsewhere in Middle English. Its form clearly represents a finite verb in

⁵ Note that þ 'that', here and elsewhere in C's text is identical in shape to the form for *þer* 'there': the abbreviation takes the form of a hook touching the lobe of the letter 'þ' and not a stroke through its ascender.

the second person singular present indicative used transitively; but its meaning here is disputed.

1.1.1. *The J scribe's version*

The J scribe appears to have had difficulty with the form *storre* for 'stars'. The word 'star' occurs four times in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, twice in the plural, once attributively and once in a compound. The forms in C, which we assume to reflect closely the forms in X, are (in language C 1): *daisterre* 328; (in language C2) *storre-wis* 1318, *storre* 1321, *steorre* 1329. J has *day-steorre*, *sturre-wis*, *storie*, *steorre*. The J scribe either misread *storre* in line 1321 or elected to emend it to the word 'story'. In the thirteenth century, 'story' is frequently used to refer to exempla from holy writ,⁶ and it may be that the J scribe, despite *sturre-wis* three lines earlier, took the word to refer not to the knowledge of astrology but to the Owl's previous claim to learning from *bokes lore* and *þe goddspelle* (lines 1208–9). Whatever his intention here, having written *storie*, the J scribe had a problem with the subsequent rhyme. He wrote *ferre*, but judging from the facsimile (Ker 1963: Jesus MS fol. 165v), it looks as if he might first have left a gap and then added the word somewhat later. The cut of the pen looks a little different for this word than that in the immediately surrounding text. When he was uncertain, the J scribe did leave gaps, presumably intending to come back to them later, e.g. at the end of lines 541, 748 and 873, where a later scribe has supplied words instead. At line 1322 the J scribe wrote the word *ferre* himself, but he did not alter *storie* in the line above, so the rhyme is spoiled. Whatever his difficulties with the rhyming words, however, the J scribe did not apparently have a problem with *bi-haiteþ*;⁷ the word is clearly written in both surviving texts, and we can therefore assume that it was the form also in the exemplar, X.

1.2. *Interpretation of textual cruxes*

Attempts at the resolution of problematic readings in medieval texts must take into account both the form and the meaning of the problem word or words. A resolved reading, whether it be a manuscript spelling or an emendation, should be plausible phonologically and morphologically, it should be syntactically well formed, and it should give good (or at least reasonable) sense in context. When we are dealing with a textual crux, very often it is because a problem word is rare, or is even unattested elsewhere. Nevertheless, the spelling system of the scribe who perpetrates the unusual form should always be considered in relation to the

⁶ Philip Bennett observes (pers. comm.) that AF *estoire* is also very frequently used to refer to a learned book, whether classical or biblical, when cited as authentication for an author's statements.

⁷ There are signs in J of an attempt by a later hand to change the word, noted by Wells (1307: 109 fn.): 'later obscurely corrected' and thence reported by Kenyon (1913: 586). But this later attempt has no bearing on the J scribe's own acceptance of the form.

proposed solution. The *hapax legomenon* (or ‘oncer’) is not uncommon in Middle English, because of the patchy survival of manuscripts and texts. Scribal spelling systems may be economical or profligate, dialectally homogeneous or mixed; but within any given system an editorial solution should be considered with suspicion, not if it is a ‘oncer’, but if its orthography and presumed phonology is alien to the spelling system(s) in which it is found.

1.2.1. Earlier interpretations of line 1322

Two early editors, Wells (1907: 176–177) and Gadow (1909),⁸ take *bi-haitest* to be from OE *behātan* ‘promise, vow’. Formally this is possible, if the *-ai-* digraph in a present tense form of the verb is seen as being influenced by forms in the past tense.⁹ Such present tense spellings do occur in early Middle English, in forms of the simplex verb *hātan*, perhaps influenced by the existence in this verb of an independent passive *hatte*, which can be present or past tense. Note, for instance, the following 3rd sg. pres. ind. forms: *hei3te* ‘is named’ in *The Life of St Eustace* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, fol. 123ra and in *Iacob and Iosep* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 652, fol. 8r; *heite* ‘is named’ in *The Bargain of Judas*, in Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.39, hand B, fol. 34r; and especially the syncopated form *bi-hait* ‘promises’ in *The Proverbs of Alfred*, Trinity, hand D, fol. 86ra. These texts, like C and J, belong in the SW Midlands, and such forms may well have been familiar to the scribe of X and indeed to the C and J scribes themselves. They are nevertheless rare spellings for the present tense of *(be)hātan* and do not occur elsewhere in the output of the C and J scribes. The J scribe has 3rd pers. sg. pres. ind. *bihoteþ*, and syncopated forms, *bi-hat*, *hat*, *hot*; 2nd pers. sg. pres. ind. *hattest*; infinitive *hote*, all once each.¹⁰ The C scribe has 3rd pers. sg. pres. ind. *hot*; 2nd pers. sg. pres. ind. *attest*; infinitive *hoten* all once each.¹¹ If the J scribe had read *bi-haitest* in X as a form of the word *behātan* in the present tense, we might expect him to have translated it into one of his preferred forms with medial *-a/-o-*.¹²

The reading suggested by Wells and Gadow also incurs syntactic and semantic difficulties. Wells (1907: 177) notes the meanings ‘promise, vow, threaten’ for *behātan* and suggests as possible translations, ‘makest vows to’ or ‘threatenest

⁸ As reported in Stanley (1960: 140); I have not seen Gadow’s edition.

⁹ For instance, the following forms are all recorded for the preterite in early Middle English texts from the SW Midlands: *(bi-)hei(h)te*, *bi-heyhte*, *(by-)heyte*, *haihte*, *heit*, *heiste*, *hei3(h)te*, *hey3tte*.

¹⁰ These forms are taken from the sample of the J scribe’s usage transcribed and tagged for the LAEME corpus. The sample comprises fols. 156r–168v, 169r–174v, 179v–180v, 182r–185v, 187r–188v: *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Poema Morale*, *Death’s Wither Clench*, *Orison to Our Lady*, *Doomsday*, *The Latemest Day*, *Ten Abuses*, *Lutel Soth Sermun*, *A Luue Ron.*

¹¹ Note that these forms are all from the C version of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and all occur in language C1. *Bi-haitest* is found in one of the sections in language C2.

¹² Note that the J scribe’s form for the preterite is *biheyhte* with *-eyh-* not with *-ai-*.

[with thy cries]'. With the former, one would expect the plural pronoun to be in the dative case¹³ not the accusative form *hi*. The same goes for the meaning 'threaten'. The word *behātan* by itself does not imply 'threaten'; in all recorded examples defined thus, in both Old and Middle English usage, it requires a word such as 'evil', 'punishment' or 'damnation' as direct object. To promise something negative is to threaten it to the sufferer, and any pronoun would then also require the dative case. In *The Owl and the Nightingale* there is no such construction or implication. Gadow (1909)¹⁴ tentatively suggests translating *bi-haitest* as 'adorest'; but there is no known parallel for this sense of *behātan*. Moreover, as Grattan points out (Grattan and Sykes 1935: 91), all such meanings are doubly ruled out by 'the "so doth many a beast" of the next line'.¹⁵

Most editors of *The Owl and the Nightingale* have not been able to make sense of *bi-haitest* as it stands and have resorted to emendation. Mätzner (1867: 44) was the first to suggest that it could have been written in error for a form of the verb 'behold'. In his footnote to line 852 [usual numbering 854] he comments on the form of the plural object pronoun *hi*, and gives line 1320 [1322] as another example: 'Thu bihaitest (bihaldest?) *hi* feorre'. The sample Mätzner edits does not include line 1322 and he makes no further comment. His idea is adopted by Kenyon (1913: 586–7), who suggests emendation to *bihaldest* and assumes an error in X resulting from a supposed similarity of <i> and <l> in the copy behind X and also the interchangeability of <d> and <t>, which is evidenced in the surviving copies, especially in C. Kenyon cites as examples C 616, 933, 1175, 1307, 1686 (<t> for <d>) and CJ 1190, 1427 (<d> for <t>). All these examples, however, are in word final position where one might expect devoicing of [d] and subsequent hypercorrection. Before a following vowel, [d] is not likely to devoice. Kenyon conjectures that a syncopated form of the verb 'would be pronounced *bihaltst*, and might easily be written *bihaltest*, and then misunderstood, because an anomalous form'. Given the constraints on medial devoicing of [d], *bihaltst* would by no means easily be written *bihaltest*, and the early Middle English data does not support the idea. The *LAEME* corpus records the syncopated spellings (-)halt (146x) and (-)hald (10x) for 3rd pers. sg. pres. ind. of '(be)hold' against 25 unsyncopated spellings, all with medial -ld-. The forms recorded for 2nd pers. sg. pres. ind. are unsyncopated (-)haldes(t) (14x), (-)holdest (4x), holdist (1x), oldest (1x) and syncopated haldst and halst (1x each). MED also records holst and halds. Medial [d] in the 2nd pers. pres. ind. is either retained or dropped — nowhere is (-)haltst recorded, for '(-)hold', let alone (-)haltest. In spite of the formal difficulties, the

¹³ *Hom* in the C text's C1 usage, *heom* with minor variants *heom* and *hom* in C2; *heom* or *heom* with minor variants *hom*, *hom*, *him* in the J scribe's usage.

¹⁴ See Stanley (1960: 140).

¹⁵ Note that these semantic and syntactic difficulties would apply also if *bihaitest* were taken to be a borrowing from OScand *heita*, cognate to OE *hātan* and with the same range of meanings.

word 'behold' does give excellent sense in the context, and it is favoured therefore by Stanley (1960: 140).¹⁶

Stratmann (1868: 58) says that 'the reading of the manuscripts *bihaitest* is not to be explained'. He suggests emendation to *biwaitest* (presumably from AF *waiter*) which, 'although not found anywhere else, may mean regardest, beholdest'.¹⁷ This would also make excellent sense in context but it would be a unique meaning for the word in 13th-century English or in Anglo-French. In early Middle English the usual senses of (a)*waiten* are 'lie in wait for', 'ambush', 'plot to injure' (see MED s.v. *waiten* senses 6a and 6b) and these are also the main meanings for AF *waiter*. Also attested early, are the senses 'watch out for [something]', 'wait and see if [something happens]' (see MED senses 1b(e) and 3b(b)). The neutral senses 'gaze at', 'pay attention to' are not recorded until the late 14th century; there are none such recorded in the corpus of tagged texts being compiled for *LAEME*. Atkins (1922: 113) points out that the scribe of X might have read exemplar <p/p> as <h> and cites examples of similar errors by the C and J scribes themselves (1922: xxxii); but we are left with the difficulty that both copying scribes apparently accepted the spelling *bihaitest* as meaningful.

Atkins (1922: 112–113) proffers a palaeographically more plausible solution. He proposes emendation to *bi-hauest* (<OE *behāwian*, 'to gaze at') arguing that the two minim strokes of <u> might well have been misread as <it> by 'the scribe of the intermediate text' (i.e. the scribe of X). This is the reading favoured by Cartlidge (2001: 131). Against it, Holthausen (1928: 247) points out that 'da ae. *behāwian* langen Vokal hat, müsste es zudem *houest* heissen'. Cartlidge acknowledges Stanley's similar opinion (personal communication in Cartlidge (2001: 131) that 'OE -āw- is more likely to have produced -o(u)w- in southern dialects of ME'. The implication is that the text behind X would have been unlikely to have a form like *bihauest* for OE *behāwian*. We have no direct evidence for the dialect(s) of the text immediately behind X, and the argument as to the 'original' dialect of the poem, based on rhyme evidence, and textual allusions has never been resolved.¹⁸ There is certainly no suggestion that northerly or northern forms of language were ever part of poem's linguistic history. Whether the language of the precursor of X was southerly, south-eastern, or SW Midland in character is uncertain. We have very little contemporary 13th-century evidence for 'southern dialects of ME'; but -aw-/-

¹⁶ Wells's alternative suggestion that *bi-haitest* represents the 2nd pers. sg. ind. of *behēdan* 'watch, regard, behold' presents similar formal difficulties. Note also that although the word is used in *Lazamon* in the sense 'observe' in *The Owl and the Nightingale* it always means 'guard (against), prevent' (lines 102, 635 and perhaps also 1048).

¹⁷ Holthausen (1928: 247) makes a similar suggestion with a further emendation rejecting the *bi-* prefix: *bute þat þu waitest him [a]lfeorre*. The prefixed form **bipait-* is not attested, though it could well have existed: there are many examples, from the earliest surviving Middle English onwards, of French loan words to which native prefixes have been added.

¹⁸ For a summary and assessment of the arguments see Cartlidge (1998).

aw- and occasional *-au-* spellings for OE *-āw-* certainly occur in the SW Midlands and in the SE Midlands at that period. Atkins' proposal cannot well be discounted on general regional grounds therefore. A more telling objection is that words with OE *-āw-* in the usage of the C and J scribes themselves are *always* realised with <o> not <a>.¹⁹ Moreover, the suggestion depends on a nonsensical error by the scribe of X being perpetuated not only by the literatim copyist of C, but also by the translating scribe of J, who normally changes forms that make no sense to him.

1.2.2. A new reading

Given that three early Middle English writers, the C scribe, the J scribe and also (by implication) the X scribe, were apparently happy to write *bihaitest*, is there any justification for emending it? It ought to mean something as it stands. Kenyon (1913: 586), who emended only reluctantly,²⁰ makes the point: 'One of two things is sure: either both scribes understood the word and copied it carefully, in which case their enviable knowledge has not been handed down to us; or they copied it faithfully because they did not understand it'. The latter might be a plausible explanation for the text of the literatim C scribe, but is far less likely in the J scribe's case. We have already seen how the J scribe leaves spaces when he apparently does not understand words. His editorial independence leads him to 'emend' some of the most difficult and most discussed readings of the poem (e.g. *breche* 14, *wiste* 115, *bov ne rinde* 242, *an oþer þ/pes* 748 and *prouehede* 1400);²¹ yet he reports *bihaitest* without change.

If both scribes did indeed understand the word then emendation is not an option. What is required is a word that could plausibly be spelt *-hait-* in the South-West Midland spelling system of X, as evidenced by C, and which is also acceptable in the spelling system of the translating scribe J. In the language of C (both C1 and C2 representing X1 and X2), the digraph <ai> is used in the following contexts:

1. in words containing OE (-) *ǣg(-)*: e.g. *aiware* 'everywhere', *dai*, 'day', *lai* pret. sg. of 'lie', *mai* sg. 'may', *maide(ne)*, 'maid(en)', *maine* 'strength', *fair-/vair-* 'fair', *snailes* 'snails';
2. in words containing OE *-eg-*: (*a*)*wai* '(a)way';
3. in *aish-* 'ask-' which probably derives from rare OE *ǣscan* (cf. *ǣsce* 'inquiry');
4. in words with *-ei-* from OScand: *nai* 'nay';

¹⁹ Forms for OE *-āw-* in the usage of C (which we may take to also to reflect those in X) are as follows: *crope* n. *cropeþ* 3rd sg pres ind. 'crow'; *icnope* sg. subj. 'recognise'; *mope* inf. 'mow'; *Snou*, *snov*, *snope* n. 'snow'; *soule* n. 'soul'; *sope* inf. *sopeþ* 3rd sg pres ind., *isope* past. ppl. 'sow'. Those in J are as follows: *crowe* n. *croweþ* 3rd sg pres ind. 'crow'; *iknowe* sg. subj. 'recognise'; *mowe* inf. 'mow'; *Snov*, *snouh*, *snowe* n. 'snow'; *soule* n. 'soul'; *sowe* inf. *soweþ* 3rd sg pres ind., *isowe* past. ppl. 'sow'.

²⁰ He refers to resorting to 'the unscholarly expedient of emendation'.

²¹ For suggestions on lines 115 and 748 see Laing 1998 and 2001 respectively.

5 in assimilated French loans: e.g. *bataile* 'battle', *maister* 'master', *plaid-* 'plead', *plait* 'plea'.

The J scribe uses *-ai-* only rarely. His orthography favours *-ay-* or *-ey-* in the native words listed above, and *-ay-* in the French loan words. *-ai-* is not entirely alien to his system, however; apart from *bihaitest* he also has *a-braid* 3rd sg pret (< OE *ābregdan*) 'move suddenly', *maist* and *mai* 2nd and 3rd sg pres ind of 'may', and *paih* 'though'. *-ai-* can be taken to be an acceptable minor variant in J, used in contexts where the scribe would more frequently write *-ay-* or *-ey-*.

It is also required that the word mean something that is done to stars, not only by the owl, but also by 'many a beast and man'. There appear to be no convincing native or Scandinavian candidates. There remains the possibility that *bihaitest* is an assimilated loan (used with native prefix *bi-*) from Anglo-French into Middle English. The root *hait* in Old French gives rise to a number of closely related words, very commonly attested in Anglo-French: see AND s.v. *heiter* (and variant *haiter*) 'to cheer, gladden, to be happy'; *ahaiter*, (and variant *enheter*) 'to cheer up, to be joyful' *desheiter* (and variants *deshaiter*, *deshatier*, *deshester*, *desheter*; *dehaiter*) 'to sadden'; *reheiter* (and variants *rehaiter*, *reheitier*, *reheter*; *reahaiter*) 'to gladden, strengthen, to be gladdened'.²²

The meaning of the morph *-hait-/heit-* is consistently to do with cheer, joy, gladness and refreshment. The dictionary citations give transitive uses: 'to cheer or gladden (someone else)' and also intransitive, impersonal and reflexive uses: 'to be cheered or gladdened by, to enjoy'.²³ *(en)heiter/(en)haiter* would seem to be just the French loan we are looking for, entirely suitable in context.

1.2.3. Potential problems

There are two possible objections to this interpretation: (a) the presence of the native *bi-* prefix; (b) the fact that the context requires that the verb be used transitively but with the sense of the intransitive, impersonal or reflexive usage.

1.2.3.1. Use of native *bi-* with French loans

Native prefixes seem to have been freely applied to French loans from early in the borrowing process. The prefix *bi-* is often substituted for French *en-*: cf. MED *bichaunten*, *biclosen*, *biflaumen*, *biginen*,²⁴ *bisa(u)mplen* and AND *enchanter*, *encloser*, *enflaumer*, *engigner*, *ensaumpler*. There are even more cases where native *bi-* has been prefixed to a French simplex in the course of borrowing: see MED *bicommencen*, *bicompassen*, *bifrapen*, *bigien*, *begilen*, *biglosen*, *bigrucchen*,

²² For Continental Old French see also Tobler-Lommatzsch s.v. *haitier* and *enhaitier* and cf. Baldinger (1997: 76–92)

²³ These are the only senses listed in AND, but Tobler-Lommatzsch records in intransitive usage the more neutral sense 'happen to, befall, experience'.

²⁴ Note that this word is used by the Jesus scribe in his copy of *The Sayings of St Bede*.

bimouen, bipeined, bipleinen, biquasshen, biquiten, biravished, birolled, biscornen, bisc(o)urgen, bisegen, bisoilen, bispused, bitraien, bitravailen, bitroilen, bitruflen. The first recordings of these words are cited from texts of various dates during the Middle English period, but some at least are found in early works; the last two, indeed, appear in *Ancrene Riwe*.²⁵ There would seem to be no formal difficulty in postulating an early Middle English verb *bihaiten* equivalent to French *enheit(i)er* or *heit(i)er*.²⁶

1.2.3.2. The problem of transitivity

The above solution presents us with a potential syntactic difficulty. If the suggested Middle English *bihaiten* were to carry the same set of senses as its French source, line 1322, *Bute þ þu bi-haitest hi feorre*, would most naturally be translated: “Except that thou gladdens them afar” which is nonsensical. For the required meaning, “delightest in, enjoyest”, we would expect the verb to have a reflexive pronoun *þe* “thyself” and that the pronoun referring to the stars would be in the dative *heom*: “Except that thou delightest thyself with regard to them”. An impersonal construction “It delights thee with regard to them” would require the verb to be in the 3rd person singular also with *þe* and *heom*. To achieve the required sense, the construction we actually have in line 1322 would need to have a semantically transferred usage for the transitive verb so that it can mean “enjoy” plus direct object. The adoption of such a meaning into an Anglicised version of the word is by no means implausible (see §1.2.3.3 below), but is there any evidence for a direct parallel in Anglo-French?

AND s.v. *heiter, haiter* records what appears to be precisely the semantic transfer required as one of the intransitive uses of the Anglo-French word — “to delight (in): Envie ... de Orgoil la fille esnee ... trop haite de autri damage *Lum lais* 58v20”. As cited, this might be translated: “Envy ... the eldest daughter of Pride ... too much delights in the harm of others”. But beware the lacunae in the quotation. The full context of the citation from lines 3115–3124 of the poem *La Lumere as Lais* is as follows:²⁷

²⁵ Cf MED *beplaiten* with *be-* suffix found in *Vices and Virtues*, London BL Stowe 34 also from the early 13th century.

²⁶ Note that Stratmann’s (1868: 58) proposed emendation to *biwaitest* would require the same combining of native prefix with French loan. Apart from Holthausen (whose own solution dispenses with the prefix), no other commentator seems to have objected to this suggestion on the grounds of the prefix. The advantage of the present suggestion is that the form requires no emendation.

²⁷ This is quoted from the edition by Glynn Hesketh (1996–2000) of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 399. The citation in AND is from MS York. Minster Library 16.N.3. Glynn Hesketh (pers. comm.) confirms that the York MS version does not differ materially from the other versions at this point. I thank Keith Williamson for checking for me the versions in BL Harley 4390 fol. 19rb (*trop heite de autre damage*) and BL Royal 15.O.ii, fol. 26r (*trop heite de autri damage*). I am grateful to Philip Bennett for help with the translation and to

Envie pus, le mal celee,	Then Envy, the ill concealed,
Est de Orguil la fille eynee.	Is the eldest daughter of Pride.
Iceste ad les filles trop mal nuries,	She [i.e. Pride] has brought her daughters up very badly,
Kar n'eiment pas bones coompainies.	Because they have no love of good company.
Ceo sunt Haunge e Detracciun	They are Hatred and Slander,
E Ravine e Occisiun,	And Rapine and Killing,
E Trop Eyte de Autri Damage	And Too Much [<i>Eyte</i>] in Others' Misfortune
E de Bien Dire ki het message,	Who hates news of Fair Speech,
E damesoyle Grundilante,	And Mistress Mumurer
E sa compaine Maloreillante	And her companion Sedition.

I leave the relevant word *Eyte* (citation variant *haite*) untranslated for the moment. As will be clear from seeing the whole passage, the context is the prosopopeia of the seven deadly sins and their daughters. The AND citation *trop haite de autri damage* is a personification, being just another of Envy's daughters. One could translate her as "Miss Too-much-delight-in-others'-misfortune" in which case this example would give us no support for our transitive use of the verb *haiter*. But as Glynn Hesketh has pointed out (pers. comm.) the personification does not prevent *haite* being a verb, since other names in the list of sins are also based on verb phrases (e.g. *de l'Oil Apele*, *Quidevalue*, *Procure Pecchez*, *Deu Oblie*). So *trop haite de autri damage* could be "Miss Too-much-enjoys-others'-misfortune". Hesketh also observed that taking *haite* as a noun is probably ruled out, since no examples with final *-e* are recorded for the substantive (see AND s.v. *heit*, *hait*, *haiz*, *het*; *ait*, *eit*). All the versions of *Lumere as Lais* agree in having final *-e*, which thus strongly supports its being a verbal form. It would be possible to take *haite* as a past participle ("Miss Too-much-delighted-by-others'-misfortune") and supply an editorial acute accent to the final *-e*, but if that had been intended by the author we might expect at least some of the versions to show a marked form, such as *hait(i)ee*; all in fact agree on the unmarked form with single *-e*. Whatever the formal classification of the word *haite*, the construction in Anglo-French involves a prepositional phrase (*de autri damage*) not a direct object.

1.2.3.3. Intransitive and transitive transferred usage

If the evidence for the transitive use of Anglo-French *haiter* with the sense "enjoy" is not completely unequivocal, our argument in any case does not depend on it. The

Glynn Hesketh for further suggestions as to meaning and for a very illuminating and helpful discussion on this passage.

proposed Middle English verb *bihaiten* would have had its place in a semantic set²⁸ that included native *brouken* and *nitten* (“have use of, benefit from, enjoy” plus direct object) and the French loans:²⁹ *dēliten*, *(en)joien*, *rejoien*, *rejoisen plēsen* and their negative equivalents *(a)noien*, *grēven*, *grucchen*. In Middle English usage these words can all mean either the giving or the receiving of good (or bad) feelings. The “delight in, enjoy” usages usually require either an impersonal or a passive construction, or a preposition such as “in” or “of” with or without the use of a reflexive pronoun. But for some of the set, MED does list examples that follow the model of native *brouken* and *nitten*, with direct object alone. The earliest citations tend also to carry the sense “have the use or benefit of”.³⁰ Moreover, the native word *liken* (< OE *lician* “to please”), which in early Middle English continued to be used impersonally as it was in Old English, could also to be used in personal constructions where it takes on the familiar modern sense “to like”.³¹ If we accept the existence of *bihaiten*, there seems no reason why it should not have enjoyed the same transferred senses.

1.2.4. Conclusions

The word *bi-haiteſt* appearing in both texts of *The Owl and the Nightingale* may be taken as an assimilated loan used with native prefix from Anglo-French *(en)hait(i)er*. There is no formal problem with such a spelling in either the C scribe’s or the J scribe’s writing system. Its range of meaning is semantically apt and its usage is syntactically defensible. There is no need therefore for the text to be emended and lines 1321–4 of *The Owl and the Nightingale* may be translated: ‘What dost thou know, wretched thing, about stars, except that thou enjoyest them in the distance? So doth many a beast and man, who knows nothing of such things’.

2. Conserving the record³²

2.1. Conflict at line 636

In the course of their debate, the Nightingale accuses the Owl of dirty habits. She tells against her the fable of the owl laying its egg amongst the falcon’s clutch and

²⁸ All cited here in the form given as headword in MED.

²⁹ The number and richness of which may perhaps account for the fact that it did not survive in competition with them.

³⁰ See e.g. MED s.v. *joien* v. sense 3(b) and cf, with somewhat later citations *rejoisen* v. senses 1–3.

³¹ See MED s.v. *liken* v. (1) sense 2 (a).

³² In the textual and palaeographical argument in §§2 and 3 I use the terminology of the medieval doctrine of *littera*. I adopt our usual conventions (established by Michael Benskin (2001: 194 n. 4). *Littera* is the abstract notion of the letter, and when referred to independently of manuscript citation, *litterae* are enclosed in single inverted commas. *Figura* is the shape of a letter in a particular script or a particular realisation within that script; manuscript *figurae* are here enclosed in angle brackets or are italicised when combined as whole words or longer. *Potestates* are sound values and are represented by IPA symbols in phonetic brackets.

the owlet subsequently fouling the nest (lines 101–126 and cf. Laing 1998). In her rebuttal, the Owl casts aspersions on the Nightingale's own sanitary habits and also mounts a defence on the grounds that many other animals (including the horse and the ox) defecate where they stand (lines 625–630) whilst babies in general have no control over their bodily functions, though they learn to do so as they grow up (lines 631–634). She summarises as follows:

Lines 635–636 of the C version (in Language C1) are:

pat can þat ʒongling hit bihede .
 ʒif hit misdeþ hit mod nede .

'How can the youngster prevent it? If it does wrong it cannot help it [it must needs].'

The J version reads:

hwat can þat yongling hit bihede .
 yf hit myskeþ hit mot nede .

The variant form *myskeþ* is simply noted without comment by most editors. Those who print both texts (Wells 1907 and Atkins 1922) note J's original form but emend it to *mys[d]eþ*, following the C version. *Myskeþ* is treated as a 'scribal error'. No editor asks what the J scribe might have meant by it, and none treats it as a potentially correct reading. It therefore does not feature in MED or OED and its chance of being given any consideration at all is thus greatly diminished.

2.2. Can *myskeþ* be rescued?

We have noted (§§0 and 1.1 above) that the C version of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is closer to the original than the J version and that editors therefore prefer C's readings, in almost all instances, to those of J. We have observed that textual cruces often coincide with places where there is textual disagreement between the two versions. But where there is textual disagreement and the reading in C is acceptable, the editors tend to ignore or emend the reading in J and ask no further questions. From the point of view of conserving the original text of the poem, this course of action is normally fine: we know that the J scribe sometimes took liberties with the text in front of him. But it should not be forgotten that the J's scribe's 'editorial' work always results in a genuine sample of early Middle English, and at a period where recorded vocabulary can frequently survive as 'oncens', ignoring or emending a scribe's readings can result in the loss of historic material in the dictionaries (cf. Laing 2001: 87–90). Moreover, in spite of the usual rule that C readings are more likely to represent the text in X, and therefore probably also the original readings, I think that at line 636, it is possible to make a case that the J scribe's reading is the more accurate.

2.2.1. *The meaning of myskeþ*

As the most recent editor points out, “much of the poem’s success clearly lies in its energetic use of such simple and unsophisticated techniques as invective, scatology and burlesque” (Cartlidge 2001:xxi). As far as scatology is concerned, the birds’ debate is shot through with a lively but crude lavatorial humour. For instance, the Owl accuses the Nightingale of frequenting the place where the privy is situated and of singing behind the ‘throne’ (*C secle, J seotle*) and ‘where men stick out their behinds’ (lines 594–596). The poet is not usually squeamish in the way he expresses bodily functions such as excretion and copulation. In context, *myskeþ* ought to mean ‘defecate’, and there does not seem to be any formal reason why it should not do so.

In Old English, the word *meox* (variants *mix*, *myx*) is plentifully attested (see Bosworth-Toller) with the senses “muck, dung, ordure, dirt”, often translating Latin *stercus*. OE *mixen* “dung-heap” persists in dialect usage to the present day. Both words are also recorded in Middle English (see MED s.v. *mix* n. and *mixen* n.) with their original meanings, as well as with transferred senses as general terms of abuse. No verb **mixan* “produce dung, defile, pollute”, formed from *mix* is recorded in Old English, nor is a verb formed from the noun found elsewhere in Middle English. Its likely existence, however, is strongly suggested by the presence of a past participle *mixed* (a ‘oncer’) found at line 2533 of *Havelok* and used as an adjectival term of abuse: *þat fule tr^aytour þat mixed cherl*.

Here it is of interest to look at a near synonym of OE *meox*, *mix*, also recorded in Old English — *dung* (cf. MED s.v. *dong* n. (1) and OED s.v. *dung*, n.). Bosworth-Toller also gives the related verb *dyngan* with the senses “to dung, manure”. A verb apparently reformed from the noun is found also in Middle English: see MED s.v. *dongen* v. (and cf. OED s.v. *dung*, v.) where both the sense “to manure” and also “to void excrement” are attested. Note too in EDD the past participle *dunged*, with the senses “manured; dirtied, messed”. It seems reasonable to postulate the existence of a parallel verb formed from *meox*, *mix*.³³

Assuming such a word to have existed in Middle and/or Old English, its lack of attestation in the surviving record would not be surprising given its specialised and/or scatological connotations. We would also have to suppose that the J scribe’s *myskeþ* represents a rare metathesised form of such a verb. This hypothesis gains possible support from the existence of a near contemporary attestation with metathesis in a place-name listed in the English Place-Name Society volume for

³³ Note that the verbs *mix* and *mixen* are recorded in the modern dialect record (see EDD) with the sense “clean out a stable, cow-house, pig-sty etc.” Note also Bosworth-Toller s.v. *miscan*, the attestation *mysceap* translating Latin *affligit* “injures, afflicts” where OE *miski* “misdeed, offence” is also adduced. This appears to be a different verb altogether, which apparently did not continue into Middle or Modern English. If it had we might expect it to be in a form with medial [ʃ] not [sk].

Nottingham: “misk is *le Misk* c.1300 *NewsteadB*, *Misk* 17756. This would seem to be an unrecorded metathesised form of OE *mix* ‘dung’. Cf. *Mixen* (St.)” (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1940: 119; cited in MED s.v. *mix* n. sense (c)). The language of the J scribe has been localised in East Herefords (see LALME LP 7440). The proposed metathesised form of earlier **mixan* in the J version of *The Owl and the Nightingale* is also endorsed by the presence of metathesis in the noun *mixen* “dung-heap” in the modern dialect record of the SW Midlands. EDD records the forms *misken* from Gloucs (and Kent) and *misken* from Staffs, Warwicks, Worcs, Herefords, Pembroke and Gloucs.

2.2.2. Cotton’s version and the possible reading in X

I believe we can assume that the J scribe intended to write a word meaning “defecate” at line 636, but where did it come from? Was a form of the word in his exemplar, or did he ‘improve upon’ exemplar *misdeþ* as reported faithfully by the C scribe? The J scribe’s reading is a *lectio difficilior* and, other things being equal, it should be preferred to the C scribe’s *lectio faciliior*. To take the J version as representing the text of X (and by implication perhaps also the authorial version) we would, however, need to accept a reversal here of the two scribe’s usual roles: the J scribe as ‘moralizing reviser’ (Arngart 1955: 135) and the C scribe as careful, literatim copyist. This is no very strong objection, because the J scribe did in fact retain a good deal of the original scatological vocabulary, while even the most fanatical literatim copyist can be expected occasionally to make an adaptation if he is stumped. It is just possible to argue, however, that the C scribe’s version was a simple misreading (see §2.2.3 below).

Because the J scribe is a translator, the exact form *myskeþ* need not have been in X for him to have produced it as his owned preferred spelling. X could have contained any acceptable Middle English spelling of the 3rd person singular present indicative of our proposed verb from OE *mix* or **mixan*. Given the C scribe’s usual care in copying from X, what can his version tell us? A glance at the facsimile (Ker 1963) of C’s *misdeþ* at line 636 shows that the <s>-longa has been written over something else. The facsimile edition reproduces the C text at actual size. Figure 1 shows a tracing from a microfilm of the original manuscript giving a larger scale.³⁴ The C scribe’s script is described by Ker (1963: xvi) as follows:

The other [i.e. the hand of C] is ‘professional’, a skilled close gothic of the mannered kind seen in British Museum MS. Royal 3 D. vi, a *Historia scholastica* datable between 1283 and 1300. This kind of writing is best in a large size (C., lines 1–9), but even in a small size (C., lines 25–34) the scribe was able to make

³⁴ This and all the other tracings from microfilm have been made for convenient reference. They have been done as carefully as possible, but without the use of medieval writing materials and after electronic reproduction for printing, they will be by no means perfect renditions. It is obviously desirable and advisable for the reader also to refer to all the relevant readings in the facsimile edition (Ker 1963).

the elaborate broken termination of vertical strokes descending to the line.

Figure 1. Scribe C's *misdep* at line 636



This sort of script required an angled cut to the nib of the pen, and is characterised by broad vertical strokes with hairline decorative diagonals. The ‘elaborate broken termination’ refers to the ‘foot’ formed by the scribe changing the direction of his pen stroke at the bottom of the ascenders of <h>, <k>, <l>, <f> and <s>-longa and on all minim strokes — that is the basic stroke for the *figura* <i> that is doubled to form <n> and <u> and tripled to form <m>. In the Cotton scribe’s version of this script, the first element of his ordinary short <r> is identical to his minim stroke. It appears that the first elements of <s>-longa and <f> are also formed this way and that the minim is then extended at the top before the head stroke is angled down and, in the case of <f> the hasta (cross stroke) added.

The basic minim stroke is usually splayed at the top, or even slightly angled, requiring a slight change of direction for the formation of the vertical stroke as well as the further change of direction for the foot. These changes of direction often result in small spikes formed by the edge of the pen. Many of the C scribe’s minims appear to be made much more simply, the angular ‘prickly’ ones being most common as the first in a sequence forming a particular *figura*. The shape underneath <s>-longa in *misdep* looks very like one of these prickly minims or the first element of short <r>, or indeed the first element of <s>-longa or <f>. Whatever *littera* was originally intended, it has been overwritten with <s>-longa. The ascender of the overwritten <s> cuts through the curved foot of the original minim, presumably to ensure the effectiveness of the overwriting, and it lacks a foot of its own.

In two places in his text (both in language C1) the C scribe miswrites <r> for <x>. In line 812 he has *for* for “fox” and in line 970 he writes *herst* for “highest”. At line 970 the J scribe reads *hexste*, but at line 812 he too has *for* for “fox”. The mistake probably arises from the fact that in some formal scripts the first element of <x> is identical to that of <r> and the second stroke, crossing the first obliquely from top right to bottom left, can also be identical at its top end to the limb of <r>. If the cross-stroke is kept short, without an extravagant tail, the two *figurae* can

look very similar indeed.³⁵ The simplest explanation for the error is that the scribe of X used this kind of <x>, which the two copying scribes mostly read correctly, but the J scribe once and the C scribe twice misread as <r>. It is interesting that in the case of *for* for “fox” both the J and the C scribe substituted 2-shaped <r>³⁶ for what they must have mistaken as a normal short <r> (required after other figural elements). For further observations about this calligraphic rule see §3 below.

Figure 2. Examples of Scribe C’s *figurae* for (a) short <r> and (b) <x> with (c) hypothetical reconstruction of <x> in X

(a)

urue uare herof

(b)

ar uox Bituxen

(c)

ar uox Bituxen

Figure 3. Hypothetical reconstruction of X at line 636

murep

³⁵ See for instance the <x>s in *exultauit* and *exultabo* in Plate 28 lines 1314 and Plate 29 line 23 respectively of Brown (1990). For an easily accessible set of examples in a script otherwise not unlike that of the C scribe (though much less ornate), see the <x>s in *exodus*, *wexen* and *waxen* in the hand of *Genesis and Exodus* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 444, fol. 49v reproduced as the verso of the frontispiece of Arngart (1968).

³⁶ Required in both their scripts after *figurae* with a rightward-facing bow, like <o>, <p> and and, in the C scribe’s script, also after curved-backed <d>.

Figure 2 (a) shows tracings from microfilm (cf. Ker 1963) of examples (from ll. 638, 640, 1076) of the C scribe's short <r>. Figure 2 (b) shows examples (from ll. 658, 825, 1747) of his *figura* for 'x', which is quite clearly differentiated from his short <r>. Figure 2 (c) shows a reconstruction³⁷ of the same sequence of words in Figure 2 (b) written with the kind of 'x' that we hypothesise was used in X. If the script of X was of a formal kind, similar in other respects to that of C, the truncated second stroke of <x> could easily be mistaken for either the 'spike' initiating the foot of <r> or for the end of the foot of a preceding ascender or minim. Figure 3 reconstructs what might have been in X at line 636. The J scribe (who only misread <x> once in the exemplar) can be supposed to have analysed the word correctly as *mixeþ*, substituting his own preferred, metathesised variant of the word *myskeþ*. We might conjecture that the C scribe, copying letter by letter, wrote *mi*, then (reading <x> as <r>) wrote the first element of the letter before gibbing at the non-word *mireþ*. Mid-word he then would have substituted something that made sense in context, overwriting the redundant first element of <r> with the <s> of *misdeþ*.

2.2.3. A simple misreading by Scribe C?

We could, however, hypothesise a different situation in X. It is somewhat more complex, but it has the advantage that it accounts both for the J scribe's reading and for the fudge in C's text, while it preserves the C scribe's status as a literatim copyist who does not normally make innovative adaptations to the text of his exemplar. Suppose the exemplar for X had at line 636 the word *misceþ* as a metathesised spelling for **mixeþ* "defecates".³⁸ Figure 4 illustrates a series of hypothesised variant figural sequences for the word. The first example, with <sc> ligatured,³⁹ shows something like what might have been in the exemplar for X; the second illustrates something like what may have been in X, and the third what scribe C thought he saw. In other words, a rendering in X like the second example might have led the C scribe to read the combination of the top element of <s> and the <c>

³⁷ It may be objected that there is an epistemological issue in the presentation of hypothetical palaeography. What I am doing here is not, however, postulating a set of principles from which we can then generalise — as we might do, for instance, when undertaking phonetic reconstruction. The reconstructions in Figures 2(c), 3 and 4 have been made in a very particular set of circumstances: the existence of two different manuscript versions of a text copied from a common exemplar. Although graphic tokens are actually attested on which to base the reconstructions (unlike with phonetic reconstruction), I am not generalising further than the particular readings under discussion. All I am doing is presenting in pictorial form exactly the kind of conjectural readings that an editor may postulate when discussing the resolution of a crux.

³⁸ In Old English there seems to have been quite frequent variation between [sk] and [ks], e.g. between *ascian* (cf. ME *asken*) and *axian* (Cf. ME *axen*); *fisc(ian)* (cf. ME *fish(en)*) and *fix(ian)* (cf. ME *fix*).

³⁹ Note that the C scribe himself ligatures <s>-longa with following <t> but not normally with following <c>. It is a common feature however in formal scripts.

as round-backed <d>, with the body of following <e> closing the ‘arms’ of <c> to form something like the biting of <de> found in Textura scripts.

Figure 4. Hypothetical reconstructed copying sequence from X’s exemplar to X to C at line 636



The combination ‘sc’ does not represent [sk] in either the C scribe’s usage or the J scribe’s usage, and it rarely does so before a front vowel in any recorded early Middle English. But cf. *æscen* “asking” in the Wintney Benedictine Rule, *ascinge* “asking” in Hand A of the Trinity Homilies, *hescet* “asks” in Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.39, hand A, and *mensce* “honour” (cf. OE *mennska*) in *Lazamon A*, hand A. The presence of such a spelling in X would have triggered the translating scribe J to substitute his own preferred <sk> for [sk]. Its rarity for [sk] may have contributed to the C scribe’s difficulties.

2.2.4. Conclusions

Whatever the origin of scribe C’s *misdeþ*, and whether or not it be accepted that a word for “defecate” related to OE *mix* was intended by the author of the *Owl and the Nightingale* at line 636, I believe we are justified in citing the J scribe’s *myskeþ* as a genuine part of the Middle English record. It is a metathesised form of either an unattested OE **mixan* or a Middle English verb *mixen* formed from the noun, for which *mixed* in *Havelok* is the only other recorded attestation.

3. A ghost difference

3.1. A revised reading at line 1526

We have said (§1.1) that many of the textual cruces in *The Owl and the Nightingale* arise in places where there is disagreement between the two surviving versions. Lines 1526–7 is one such place; the C version (in language C2) has:

An suieþ⁴⁰ þare þ [noriht] naueþ .
An haueþ attom his rihte spuse .

I place *noriht* in brackets because I dispute the reading, for which see the argumentation in §3.1.1 below. The J version of these two lines is:

⁴⁰ Sic. All editors read *siueþ* with no comment. The C scribe only occasionally uses an oblique hairline stroke to differentiate <i> from other minims. Here there is a clear example of such an indication on the third minim. *Suieþ* is a plausible development in Middle English from AF *suier*. The J scribe’s version *syweþ* derives presumably from the variant form *sivre*.

ȝ syweþ þare . þat noht naueþ .
ȝ haueþ atom his riche spuse .

The most recent editor makes a feature both of the J scribe's incompetence here and of the different emphases drawn by the two different scribes (Cartlidge 2001: XLII):

Sometimes J's errors are camouflaged by a semblance of sense. At ll. 1526–7, for example, where C reads, “An siueþ þare þat no riht naueþ/ An haueþ atom his riȝte spuse” [‘and pursues the woman who has no right, while he keeps his rightful spouse at home’], the J-scribe wrote *noht* instead of *no riht* and then extended his misreading by writing *riche* instead of *riȝte*. His interpretation is that the man's error lies in choosing to abandon a wealthy woman in favour of a poor one. Although this interpretation makes perfect sense, it is a [sic] clearly a travesty of the poet's attempt to highlight the man's adulterous cruelty.

I believe that in line 1526 the J scribe was not in fact in error and that the supposed textual difference between the two versions in this line is a chimera. But I agree with Cartlidge that in line 1527 the J scribe has missed the point entirely and perhaps more so than has previously been thought.

3.1.1. *no riht* is not right

All editors of *The Owl and the Nightingale* print at line 1526 *no riht* for the bracketed form in the citation from the C version above. Cartlidge (2001: 136) is the only one who indicates in his textual note to the line that ‘the two words’ are in fact run together in the manuscript. Figure 5 shows a tracing from microfilm of the figural string in C.

Figure 5. Scribe C's *no[r]iht* at line 1526



The reading *no riht* “no right” may be questioned. The J scribe has *noht* “naught”. It is assumed by Cartlidge, and all previous editors, that the difference between the two readings here does not represent a worrisome crux, but is rather an example of the J scribe's habit of emendation. This is certainly true for the next line. Where the C scribe has *riȝte*, the J scribe writes *riche* “rich”, which is very unlikely to represent the poet's original, since it spoils the contrast between the pampered mistress and the slighted wife. It only ‘makes perfect sense’ in a narrowly syntactic context, since the theme of the neglected *mal mariée* continues all the way to line 1602. However, the supposed different reading in the J version at line 1526 may indicate that there was difficulty in the exemplar at this point.

If we assume that the apparent *norih*t of the literatim copyist scribe C does indeed represent “no right”, what observations can we make?

(a) The unmarked form of *no* would be morphologically correct in context: *riht* was a neuter noun in Old English. However:–

(b) If “no right” were intended, the fact that the two words have been run together by the C scribe would seem to have triggered his use of 2-shaped <r>. As observed above (§2.2.2), in formal, Textura kinds of script, this *figura* of <r> is used only after *figurae* that have a right-facing bow, i.e. <o>, , <p> and, in the C scribe’s version of the script, also after round-backed <d>. In all other contexts short <r> (like modern printed <r> in shape) is used. The C scribe’s practice is absolutely regular in this respect and he confines his use of the two kinds of ‘r’ to their traditional contexts, without a single lapse. Moreover, unless a capital <R> is adopted, short <r> is always used word initial in his script. 2-shaped <r> never appears word initial, even if the previous word ends with a right-facing bow. Note, for instance (in Ker 1963), Scribe C’s use of short <r> not 2-shaped <r> in *to red* (l. 680) and in *to rede* (ll. 1464 and 1764). See also short <r> in *mid rihte* (ll. 156, 179, 184, 264, 470, 543, 1145, 1680); *mid rihte* (l. 1345); *mid rede* (ll. 702, 704) and *mid ruze* (l. 1013).

(c) Given (b) above, in Scribe C’s script, *norih*t for “no right” with 2-shaped <r> would be ‘correct’ usage if it were seen simply as a string of unsplit *figurae*. But if the collocation is thought of as two separate words, we would expect them to be divided and regular short <r> to be employed, not 2-shaped <r>.

The C scribe does run words together sometimes, but much less frequently than is observable in many formal scripts of the kind he uses. By far the most common cases in C are where a preposition has been cliticised to the following word and where a pronoun or article has been cliticised to a preceding or following word. Unmarked *al* “all”, whether adjectival or adverbial, is also sometimes cliticised to the word it qualifies. Otherwise, the C scribe will occasionally run two (or, less commonly, three) words together apparently accidentally, or at least with no discernable motivation. Adjectives, however, are very rarely linked to their nouns in his text, and this is true of the word “no” except in those collocations that had already at this date begun to be thought of as single semantic units, e.g. “no man”, “no thing”, “no more”. Language C2 (which includes the passage here discussed) has *namore* and *noman* twice each, but *na more* once and also six examples of “no” and “man” (in various spellings) written as two words. It has *noping* once and *no ping* once. Language C1 has *noping* three times and *namo* once, but *na mo* and *na more* once each, while *no man* appears four times, always divided. Even in these collocations, the C scribe, or his precursor, seems still to have a sense of the separability of “no” from its following noun. “No” and “right” do not combine as a compound and there is every reason to suppose that the C scribe would have thought of the collocation as two separate words.

(d) Even assuming “no right” to have been intended by scribe C, given (c) above, the running together of *no* and *riht* would have to imply that he was not thinking of the sense when he wrote *norih*t with 2-shaped <r>, but was copying mechanically and probably from a single string of letters in the exemplar.

Given observations (b) to (d) above, it is unlikely that the string in X was *norih*t. What else could it have been? I propose that the most likely candidate is *noziht*. I further suggest that the figural sequence in C, reproduced in Figure 5, itself represents *noziht* and not *norih*t. I will first (§3.1.3) justify *noziht* as a viable early Middle English spelling for the word “naught”, and then attempt (§3.1.4) to describe the palaeographical rationale for the sequence in C to be read as such.

3.1.3. *Noziht as a spelling for “naught”*

Scribe C’s writing system employs yogh ‘ȝ’, wynn ‘w’ and thorn ‘þ’. It is evident from C’s literatim copy, that both the writing systems represented in the exemplar X also utilised these *litterae*. Scribe J’s writing system lacks ‘ȝ’. For initial [j] he prefers ‘y’ and for [xt] he uses ‘ht’. The J scribe also prefers ‘w’ to ‘p’, though he does use for [w] a *figura* indistinguishable from his ‘y’, and presumably intended for ‘p’, six times: *pit* “with, against” (l. 57), *pnne* “joy” (l. 272), *plite* “face” (l. 439), *pit pest* “wit waxes” (l. 689), *pere* “were” (l. 785).

It is now generally accepted that in the C scribe’s script, the *figurae* for ‘p’ and ‘þ’ represent a cline of shapes formally distinguishable at each end but not in the middle (Stanley 1960: 9–10; Cartlidge 2001: L–LI). The C scribe usually dots <p> and leaves <þ> undotted but there are exceptions to both practices. His ‘y’ is indistinguishable from his ‘p’, but appears only a dozen times (listed by Cartlidge (2001: LI)) because he prefers ‘i’ in vocalic contexts and ‘ȝ’ for [j]. It is clear that the *figurae* used for ‘þ’, ‘p’ and possibly ‘y’ were also difficult to distinguish in X, because the J scribe writes <þ> instead of <p> in *þod* “wot, know” (C *pod*) (l. 1190),⁴¹ and <Hw> instead of <þ> in *Hwat* for “that” (C *þat*) (l. 404). Note also in line 943 his subpunction of a partly written <w> for the following correct <þ> in *lope*.⁴²

Not only did X’s writing system have similar *figurae* for ‘þ’ and ‘p’, but it is apparent from the C scribe’s copy that it could also allow occasional substitution of <ȝ> for <þ/p>.⁴³ Cartlidge (2001: LI) lists a number of cases in language C2

⁴¹ In the subsequent five lines (ll. 1191–1195), where the construction “I know” is repeated, the J scribe has *wot* in each case. The C scribe (presumably faithfully following X) has *pot*, *pot*, *pat*, *pat* and *pot*.

⁴² These observations were first made in print in Laing (2001: 110 n. 48) and I am grateful to Neil Cartlidge for first drawing my attention to them. The J scribe’s *wunglinge* for “youngling” (C *ȝunglinge*) (l. 1447) could imply, as Cartlidge (2001: 135) suggests, similarity of <y> and <p> in X or (in view of the later argument in this paper) substitution of <p> for <ȝ> in X, correctly analysed by scribe C.

⁴³ This is paralleled in a number of other SW Midland writing systems, most dramatically in that of Scribe D of Cambridge, Trinity College B.14.39 (Laing 1999: 255–259).

where the scribe writes “*p* instead of *h* or *ʒ*”, in [ç~x] contexts but all such spellings are paralleled in other early Middle English writing systems without clear litteral equivalence of ‘*p*’ and ‘*ʒ*’ and it is arguable that they may stand for [θ~ð] in these contexts rather than [ç~x]. The only certain indication of the litteral equivalence is if we find the figura <3> used in ‘*p*’ or ‘*p*’ contexts. The one clear example in language C2 is *ʒif* “wife” (l. 1469) (J *wif*).⁴⁴ There are several more instances in language C1: *poʒe* “crooked” (l. 815) with initial <p> corrected from a partially erased but still clearly visible <3>; *pin* “thine” (l. 990) with <p> corrected from <3> by overwriting;⁴⁵ *nobeles* “nonetheless” (l. 679) with medial <p> corrected from <3> by overwriting.⁴⁶ Note also *soʒe* “sooth” (l. 184) (J *sope*).⁴⁷ It is clear from the number of corrections, that the C scribe understood the <3> for <p/p> substitution in X but that his own system did not favour it. He is habitually a litteratim copyist, but not always what we might call a ‘figuratim’ one. Since the C scribe confines his occasional use of ‘y’ (identical to his ‘p’) to vocalic contexts (either for [i] or for the second element of a vocalic digraph), appearance in his text of <p/p> for [j] would also support the hypothesis of figural equivalence of <p/p> and <3> in X. One clear example of this is the C scribe’s *underpat* “understood” (l. 1091),⁴⁸ presumably replicating what was in X rather than changing <p/p> to <3> which he favours in this word elsewhere (ll. 168, 1055). The J scribe also normally understands the equivalences in X: he writes *underyat* at line 1091, translating X’s *underpat* to his own usual spelling. Compare also (l. 1403) C’s *ʒeonep* “gape after”

⁴⁴ But see §4.1.2 below for another possible example.

⁴⁵ Cartlidge (2001:126) suggests that the correction is from *ʒin* to *pin*. But this assumes that the C scribe did not correct as he went along. I think that the evidence shows that he often did so, noticing his mistake straight away before he finished writing the word. This example strongly suggests the scribe of X had litteral equivalence of ‘*p*’, ‘*p*’ and ‘*ʒ*’. I believe the C scribe saw *ʒin* and copied it litteratim. He then realised that in his system this produced a non-word, recognised the figural <p/ʒ> interchange, overwrote <3> and the first minim with <p> and then added the necessary extra minim to produce *pin* before copying the next word.

⁴⁶ Note also the following word *ʒut* where <3> is corrected by overwriting from some other letter. It seems likely that there was a difficulty in the exemplar here. J has *nobeles p-hyet* (or *hpet*). The redundant <p> has a little stroke after it. It is difficult to imagine what form(s) in X could have given rise to the different responses in C and J but it seems clear that X had at least occasional <p/ʒ> interchange.

⁴⁷ Grattan (1935) and Stanley (1960) emend this form to *foʒe* “propriety”. Other editors including Atkins (1922: 18–19) and Cartlidge (2001: 112) accept *foʒe* as the actual reading and consider the form to need no emendation. However, the small cross-stroke on the initial letter observed by Cartlidge is nothing like Scribe C’s normal boldly formed hasta and is merely a slightly smudged version of the normal ‘shoulders’ of the <s>-longa created by a splay of the pen when the first minim stroke is made and before the top stroke is added. The letter is ‘s’ not ‘f’, though it must be remembered that this scribe does sometimes write one for the other. An interpretation of rare *foʒe* from OE *gefōg* is therefore possible though unlikely, especially with the evidence of J’s *sope*, and the other evidence of <3> and <p/p> substitution in X, making *soʒe* a feasible spelling for “sooth”.

⁴⁸ But see §§4.1.1 and 4.1.3 below for two other possible examples.

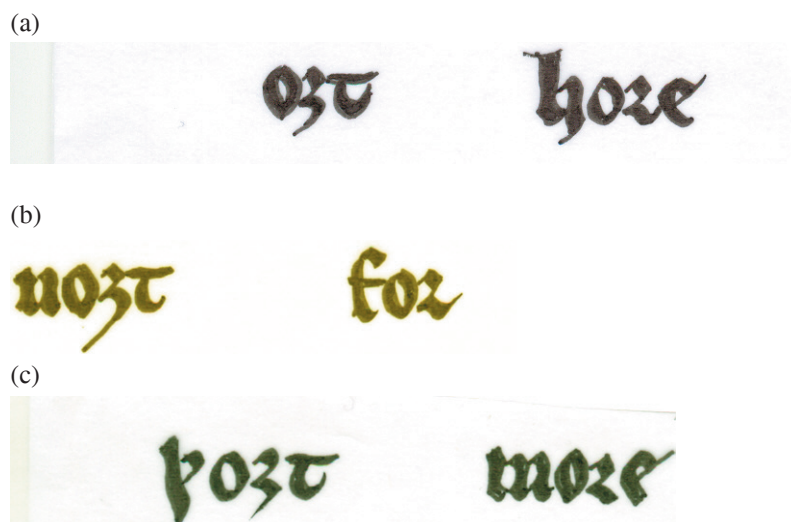
with J's *wunneþ* "strive after". Whatever the first consonant in X, it seems that the two copyists have interpreted the figural equivalence differently.

It is clear from the above that *noziht* could well have been written in X for "naught" as a variant of *nopiht*. *Nopiht* "not" itself appears at l. 928 and cf. from language C1 *nopizt* at l. 884. The J scribe must have recognised the form in X for what it was and substituted his usual form for "not, naught" — *noht*. I believe that Scribe C simply copied X's form accurately, failing (as he sometimes did elsewhere) to change the *figura* <3> to <p>. Why then has the sequence been read by all editors as *norihþ*?

3.1.4. The formation of Scribe C's 2-shaped <r> and <3>

The C scribe normally forms 2-shaped <r> and <3> with an identical sequence of strokes as far as the baseline. There are somewhat variant forms but most variant types are observable in both 2-shaped <r> and in <3>: see Figure 6 (a) to (c) for examples traced from the microfilm of the original manuscript.⁴⁹ For the sake of strict comparison, the traced examples of both 2-shaped <r> and <3> are only from contexts immediately following <o>. At the baseline, the strokes employed differ between the two *figurae*. In their clearest forms (see Figure 6 (a)), the bottom stroke of 2-shaped <r> is a broken stroke formed like a modern tilde, with the end of it angled upwards to meet the following *figura*; the second lobe of yogh, on the other hand, is an unbroken curve becoming hairline below the baseline.

Figure 6. Examples of Scribe C's *figurae* for <3> and 2-shaped <r> after <o>



⁴⁹ The examples in Figure 6 (a) are from lines 662 and 627, those in 6 (b) from lines 171 and 161 and those in 6 (c) from lines 492 and 539.

Because yogh is a longer *figura*, its first element usually sits a little above the baseline, while 2-shaped <r> usually sits on it. At their most similar, these height differences are minimised. In these cases, one only has to place a rule under the two *figurae* at the level of the baseline and they become impossible to distinguish: see e.g. (in Ker 1963) *amorze* “tomorrow” (l. 432), *nozt apord* “not a word” (l. 1532). If the upward tilt of the final stroke of 2-shaped <r> is missing and if yogh’s hairline becomes faint the *figurae* could well be mistaken for each other: see e.g. the yogh in *rizte* (l. 984), though here the absence of a preceding right-facing bow would preclude reading the *figura* as 2-shaped <r>. There is evidence that the exemplar’s script was similar in this respect: see *for 3if* “for if” (l. 1500) where the C scribe originally wrote *fo3 3if* with identical *figurae* and only afterwards, and rather clumsily, added the upward tilt to the bottom stroke of two-shaped <r>. It is therefore perfectly feasible that the sequence in X copied by the C scribe here was in fact the single word *noziht*. But can the C scribe’s own form be read as *noziht*?

If you look at the tracing in Figure 5 or at the facsimile version (Ker 1963), the third letter in the string is unusual. After the first two elements, which could be those of either 2-shaped <r> or <3>, it just stops as though the C scribe’s pen stopped moving or as if the ink stopped flowing. At first sight this is what makes the *figura* seem more like 2-shaped <r>: the lack of upturn to the ‘tilde’ is less obvious than the lack of a downward curving descender. This factor makes this rendition of the *figura* unusual in C. But there are a few examples of 2-shaped <r> that are similar to it: see *word* (l. 139), *hore* (l. 390), and *sore* (ll. 540, 1084, 1595, 1603). But there are also examples of <3> where there is no downward curve to the last element of the letter, the pen just stops and the descender is formed only by a straight fine hairline stroke:⁵⁰ see *ozer* (l. 118), *poztest* (l. 157) *upbrozte* (l. 200) *hoze* (l. 701), *iloze* (l. 847), *loze* (l. 1052), *nozt* (l. 1277), *hozeb* (l. 1602), *itozen* (l. 1735). Moreover, if the *figura* in *no[]iht* at l. 1526 were to be substituted for either 2-shaped <r> or <3> in any context where the reading of the word is undisputed, I doubt it would raise any question.

If one studies the facsimile edition very closely, it is possible to persuade oneself (though not necessarily one’s colleagues) that there is in fact a very fine hairline angled down right to left from the second element of the <r/3> in *no[]iht*. Oddly, though, the hairline also seems to go up from it. It is so fine that I did not attempt to reproduce it in Figure 5, and believed at first that its apparent presence might just be something to do with the quality of the background in the facsimile. I am very grateful therefore to Christian Liebl, who checked this for me in the original manuscript, and who confirms (pers. comm.) the presence of the hairline that “seems to go both up and down, and there is no commitment either way”. This is not a context where the C scribe normally uses a purely decorative hairline. One

⁵⁰ For the sake of strict comparison I cite only examples of <3> after <o>.

could argue that the up side of the hairline might be read as part of the following <i>, but that the downward part cannot be read as anything except the tail of <3>. It looks, however, like a single fine stroke, and unless we were fancifully to assume that the C scribe was here deliberately hedging his bets, it is difficult to know what to make of it.

Whatever the C scribe's intentions here, I propose that *noziht* "naught" was the reading in X. Scribe J's reading *noht* supports this, and if the *figura* in C be read as <ɿ> rather than <3> it was a mechanical, though very understandable, error.

3.1.2. What does the new reading do to the sense?

If the reading "no right" is a chimera and the correct reading in C is *noziht* "naught", then J's reading at l. 1526 is also correct. But the J scribe takes *noht* simply to refer to lack of money and possessions: "he spends on that (woman) everything he has and pursues her who has nothing". His *riche* in l. 1527 shows that he is contrasting a penniless (presumably gold-digging) mistress and a wealthy wife. This misses the main point of the intended contrast between the pampered mistress and the neglected, abused wife. But the reading *noziht* in C does not need to weaken the previously supposed contrast between the women with no conjugal rights and the *rizte spuse*. The verb *spenen* can mean "spend money", but it can also imply (as in modern English) the expending of other resources such as energy, time, attention and love. Consider the two versions at ll. 1548–1550. C has:

Ʒi hit is Ʒe more unriht
 Ʒ he his luue spene on Ʒare .
 Ʒ nis purƷ one of hire heare .

J reads:

Ʒi hit is Ʒe more vnryht .
 Ʒ he his spene on Ʒare .
 Ʒ nis wurƷ on of hire heare .

The J scribe leaves out the word *luue*. If this was deliberate, he presumably intended the word *his* to mean "his resources", and the J version here continues the monetary theme that it began at line 1527. But did the poet intend this theme to be paramount here? The abused wife is certainly deprived of proper food and clothing (ll. 1528–1530), but just as importantly she is deprived of attention, respect and kindness (ll. 1531–1540). The whole section about the contrasting behaviour of the good merchant or knight following (ll. 1575–1592) is to do with attention and kindness and is not about money. The contrast in ll. 1548–1550 is between the good qualities of the wife and a woman "who is not worth one of her hairs". I believe ll. 1526–7 are also not so much to do with the contrast between legal lack of rights and rightfulness as they are to do with worth of a different kind. The word *rizte* can mean "true" (in all its senses) as well as "rightful". And "naught" in line

1526 could be taken to mean “nothing of worth”.⁵¹ We might then translate the two lines: “And pursues one who has nothing to recommend her, and has at home his true wife”.

4. *Three further cruces*

4.1. *Litteral substitution again*

Once it is realised that in X there can be occasional substitution of <3> for <p/p> and vice versa, it is clear that some long-term cruces may be re-examined in the light of this.

4.1.1. *The problem at line 1342*

The C version and the J version have different readings at l. 1342 — a signal, as we have seen before, of a potential difficulty in the reading of X. The context in the debate is the Nightingale’s response to the Owl’s accusation that she leads women astray by encouraging them to break their marriage vows. The Nightingale hotly denies this, insisting that although she sings of love near where there are ladies and pretty maids, wedlock was never disgraced because of her. Lines 1340–42 in the C version read:

For god pif mai ispusing .
Bet luuien hi[r]e⁵² o3ene pere .
Þane apēt hire copenere .

The J version has:

For god wif may in spusinge .
Bet luuyen hire owe were .
þane on oþer hire copinere .

Most editors agree that the reading *apēt* in C is corrupt and that J’s reading represents an emendation by the scribe in an attempt to make sense of a corrupt or difficult reading in X. J’s version may be translated: “For a good wife may in wedlock better love her own husband than another [woman may love] her lover”.⁵³ Since the C scribe frequently has difficulty discriminating between X’s <r> and <t> (note e.g. *hite* for *hire*) in l. 1341) the commonly accepted emendation for *apēt* is *ape[r]* “anywhere”.

⁵¹ Note that “worthless” is the usual meaning of “naught” when used as an adjective in Middle English.

⁵² MS *hite* with <r> interlined above <t> by a later hand.

⁵³ Given his character as ‘moralizing reviser’, it is possible that the J scribe, whether or not he had difficulty with the exemplar reading, deliberately changed the syntax here. Rather than contrasting conjugal love and extramarital love in the same woman, he prefers to compare the virtuous wife and her conjugal fidelity with a different woman’s love for her lover.

While the formal emendation is thus plausible, the sense is not very convincing. Atkins (1922: 174) has to stretch it considerably to provide a satisfactory translation: “For a virtuous wife may, in her married state, love here own husband better far than any philanderer”. The latest editor (Cartlidge 2001: 131) proposes an ingenious solution to this problem, retaining *apet* as a syncopated variant of *apedep* “goes mad [with lust]”. He is forced, however, to read *þane* as *þane* “when”. This is formally perfectly possible with <þ/p> equivalence in Scribe C’s writing system, and would not be militated against by J’s version because of the evidence for <þ/p> equivalence also in X. But this reading distorts the syntax, removing the required “than” from the comparative construction: “For a good wife may in wedlock better love her own husband when her lover goes mad [with lust]”. Cartlidge’s (2001: 33) translation shows how much liberty he has to take with the actual text in order for his suggestion to seem plausible: “for a good woman does better to love her own husband, leaving her lover to rave”.

What happens to the text if we take *apet* in X to be an example of the scribe’s occasional <p> for <3> substitution, not picked up on this occasion by either the J scribe or the C scribe? This would give us the form *a3et*, which would be the expected spelling in Scribe C’s system⁵⁴ for the regular syncopated 3rd person singular present indicative of the Middle English verb from OE *agitan*, *ongitan* “comprehend, understand, know, learn, recognise, perceive, acknowledge” (see MED s.v. *ayiten* v.). This reading solves all the formal, syntactic and semantic problems of line 1342: “For a good wife may in wedlock better love her own husband than her lover understands”. It is typical of the Nightingale that she takes it for granted that the married woman has a lover; the important thing for her honour is that she may love her husband better.

4.1.2. The problem at line 1180

At line 1173 the Nightingale calls down the wrath of God almighty on the Owl for being constantly a harbinger of doom. The Owl replies robustly and wants to know if the Nightingale has taken holy orders since she is usurping the powers of the priesthood with her anathema. The C version of ll. 1177–82 reads:

Ʒat quap ho hartu ihoded .
 Oþer þu kursest un-ihoded .
 For prestes pike ich pat þu dest .
 Ich not 3ef þu pere 3aure prest .
 Ich not 3ef þu canst masse singe .
 Inoh þu canst of mansinge .

“ ‘What!’ said she, ‘art thou in holy orders? Or do you curse as a layman? For I see you are performing the office of a priest. I do not know whether thou were [3aure]

⁵⁴ Cf. the singular subjunctive form with expected final *-e* in *bi-3ete* (l. 726).

priest. I do not know whether thou knowest how to sing mass. Thou knowest plenty about cursing.”

The word *zaure* in l. 1180 has caused problems for editors. That there is an underlying problem with the reading is indicated by the fact that the J scribe omits it altogether, his text otherwise following the same pattern as the C version. Atkins (1922) rejects Wells’ (1907) and Grattan’s (1935) derivation from OE *gearwe* “clearly, certainly, actually” and he and Stanley (1960) take *zaure* to be a variant of the word “ever” (< OE *ǣfre*), which certainly gives good sense — “I do not know whether thou were ever [a] priest”. Cartlidge (2001: 128) thinks that *zaure* as ‘a variant spelling of “ever” is equally implausible’ and follows a suggestion by Dobson (1961: 410) that *zaure* is a blend of “yore” (< OE *gēara*) with *aure* (< OE *ǣfre*). He offers the translation “ever before, formerly”.

The spelling *zaure* for “ever” is less implausible than Cartlidge makes out and, to my mind, far more plausible than the idea of a scribal blend. *zaure* for “ever” would be a perfectly feasible spelling in a writing system that combined the features of <a> for OE *ǣ* with excrescent initial <3>. These features are most common in the SE Midlands, but excrescent initial <3> is found in both Egerton versions of *Poema Morale* placed in S. Worcs and *auer(e)* for “ever” is found in both hands of *Lazamon A*, from N. Worcs. *zaure* could therefore arguably be either a carry over from an earlier SE Midland linguistic strand, copied literatim by the C scribe and rejected by the J scribe, or even a local SW Midland form. Two factors, however, are strongly against it (1) the J scribe’s rejection of it as not only unfamiliar but not even recognisable enough to translate; (2) the fact that the C Scribe, copying literatim from X, has only *e-* and *ea-* spellings for “ever” elsewhere in his text, so that both excrescent initial <3> and <a> for OE *ǣ* would be here unique in this word both in C and, by implication, in X.

If we invoke again X’s occasional substitution of <3> for <p/p> and vice versa, we have the possibility of reading either *paure* or *paure*, whether as an adverb, or as an adjective modifying “priest”. The first gives no plausible sense. The second does. Bosworth-Toller cites an Old English adjective *wæfre* with the senses: 1. “flickering, wavering, quivering”; 2. “wavering, languishing”; 3. “active, nimble”. Holthausen (1934:) for the same word s.v. *wæfre*, gives the same range of senses and includes also “wandernd, ruhelos”. The adjective is not recorded in MED, but the closely related OE *wafian* “to wave”, gives rise in Middle English to *waven* and *waveren*, both attested (in later Middle English) with the sense “wander”. Early Middle English *paure* (here spelled *zaure*) from OE *wæfre* with the sense “wandering” would give excellent sense in the context of the birds’ debate: “I am not aware that thou were a wandering priest”.

The poet, through the personae of the two debaters, continually contrasts the Owl’s steadiness and gravitas with the Nightingale’s lightweight dilettantism. The accusation of being a *gyrovagus* would be a perfect insult for the Owl to level at

the Nightingale. The vagrant priest was held in contempt by medieval society since most of his kind were seen to be spongers and vagabonds (see Waddell 1954: ch. 8). The regular clergy, such as clerks, monks and canons (l. 729) were obliged to be stable and remain in their religious houses, living lives of contemplation and prayer, while even the secular clergy were supposed to stay in their parishes (*prostes upe londe*, l. 733) ministering to their flocks.

4.1.3. *The facilities at l. 650*

As part of the trading of abuse between the two birds, the Owl allies owlkind with mankind in the provision of suitable conveniences near the nest or house (see further §5 below). Lines 649–652 read as follows in the C version:

ȝe nimeþ ðeme of manne bure .
An after þan pe makeþ ure .
Men habbet among oþer ipende
A rū hus at hore bures ende .

And in the J version:

ȝe yeme nymeþ of manne bure .
ȝ after þan we makieþ vre .
Men habbeþ among oþre iwende
A rū hus . at heore bures ende .

“We take heed of men’s dwellings and after that example we make ours. Men have, among other [*ipende*], a privy at the end of their house.”

The word *ipende* (J *iwende*) has caused problems for editors (see Cartlidge 2001: 120–121 for a summary). Most agree that the meaning must be something like “contrivances, conveniences, facilities”, but none has been able to provide a wholly convincing derivation.⁵⁵

If, however, we assume that X here had *ipende* for *izende*, that the C scribe failed to substitute <3> for <p>, while the J scribe made a mechanical substitution of <p> for <p/3> (cf. *wunglinge* l. 1447), then we have a different possible derivation. The verb *zene* (J *yene*) occurs twice in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, as in infinitive at l. 845 and as 1st sg present indicative at l. 893. In both these contexts it means “counter, rejoin”. The verb derives from OE *gegegnian*, and in Middle English a closely related verb probably goes back to OScand *gegna*: see MED s.v. *yeinen* and *geinen*. The most common meaning for both verbs is “be useful, avail, help, serve the purpose”. One would expect the past participle of this verb to be spelled

⁵⁵ I agree with Cartlidge (2001: 121) in rejecting also my own tentative suggestion of taking *oþer* as a noun and *ipende* as past participle of *wēnen*: “Men have among other things [that they’ve] thought up, a privy...”.

(i)zende in the C scribe's usage. An adjective formed from the past participle and functioning as a plural noun would mean — “facilities”.

5. The mystery house

5.1. Rum-hus or run-hus?

The scatological element of *The Owl and the Nightingale* involves the two birds trading insults about their sanitary habits. A term for “privy” is twice used by the Owl to make two mutually inconsistent digs against the Nightingale. At l. 592 she accuses the Nightingale, when she sings near people's houses, of taking up a position right behind the unpleasantness of the privy. At l. 652, as discussed above, she praises the ingenuity of mankind in providing for themselves a privy nice and near the house, so that they don't have too far to go — just like owls in fact. The word used for “privy” is in each case (and in both versions) *rū hus(e)* with a bar over the <u> to indicate a missing nasal. Editors up to now have all read the word as *rum-hus(e)*, and have offered two possible explanations for it, summarised by Cartlidge (2001: 210):

The word *rumhus*, ‘privy’, has been thought to derive from the OE adj. *rūm*, ‘roomy’, (in which case the word is a facetious euphemism, ‘roomy building’, for a building which is characteristically rather confined) or from the verb *rȳman*, ‘to clear, open up, make space’ (in which case the sense is ‘cleaning-up room’ — or perhaps even ‘easing-’ or ‘relieving-room’). See OED, s.v. “room”, *adj.* sense 4; *MED*, s.v. “rum-hous”.

He continues:

I owe to Margaret Laing the observation that, since the suspension-mark in both MSS could also be expanded as an *n* rather than *m*, the proper reading could also be *runhus*, that is ‘secret room’ or ‘private room’. Such a word would be directly equivalent to the original sense of the French loan, ‘privy’.

This observation was made at the time as a casual suggestion, but I think it deserves to be looked at in more detail. Whether *rumhus* or *runhus* is read, neither is recorded for “privy” in Old English. Roberts et al. (1995: 241) lists for a privy: *adela*, *earsgang*, *feltūn*, *forþgang*, *gang*, *gangern*, *gangpytt*, *genge*, *grēp/grȳpe*, *grōf*, *heolster*, *ūtgang*; for the seat of a privy: *gangsetl*, *gangstōl*; and for the building: *gangtūn*, *nīedhūs*. Of these, most (*gang-/geng-*) are either “the place where one goes”, or are transferred usage from the “passage” or act of defecating (*adela* simply means “filth”) and/or the “passage” or latrine or drainage mechanism for getting rid of the results (cf. also *grēp/grȳpe*, *grōf* all meaning “ditch”). I take *feltūn* to be of this kind too. *Tūn* may be translated “an enclosed space”. The etymology of *fel* is obscure, but I can only suppose it is related to “fall” and, in context, to refer to the dropping of excrement. Only *nīedhūs* “need house” and *heolster* “dark

place”, therefore, are at all coy about the functionality of the object named. Of the above list only *gang* and *gangpit* (alongside *ganghole*, *ganghous* and *gangthirl*) are recorded in MED with the continuing sense “privy” in Middle English. *The Owl and the Nightingale*’s *rū hus* may have been current in Old English (but with no surviving attestation), or it may have been a Middle English formation.

It is perhaps unfortunate that *rum-hus* with <m> has become firmly fixed in all the editions and in all the literature as well as in the dictionaries. The word is attested in no other text and in all four of its appearances (twice in each version) no <m> actually exists. To be sure, a nasal consonant is implied by the suspension bar and is required, but *run-hus(e)* is quite as likely to be the implied form of the word as *rum-hus(e)*.

Given the preponderance of Old English forms with the “going, passage, drain” theme, it is worth considering that the postulated Middle English *run-hus* might derive from OE *ryne* “running, course, stream, flow”. One could either take it to mean “the place one runs to” or “the place where one makes a stream”. Against this is the fact that both C and J have only *eorn-*, *urn-* for “run”. It is also apparent that a privy is the place where people go as much (or more) to defecate as to urinate.

OE *heolster* and the later AF assimilated loan *privé* indicate a semantic strand for the word “privy” emphasising secrecy. The reading *run-hus* could form a member of this set.⁵⁶

OE *rūn(e)* and its reflex in Middle English (see MED s.v. *roun(e* n. (2)), do not mean exactly the same thing as AF *privé*. For one thing, *privé* is primarily an adjective, and *rūn(e)* primarily a noun. *Privé* therefore carries none of the senses of writing, language, utterance, song, (secret) letter attached to *rūn(e)*; but the overlap between the two is still considerable. Both have primary meanings to do with secrecy, mystery, obscurity, privacy and intimacy.⁵⁷

Gaimar’s Anglo-French *L’Estoire des Engleis* (Bell 1960: 140) describes the treacherous assassination of King Edmund of Wessex by Edriz acting on the orders of King Cnut. Edriz had invented ‘an unerring bow’ which he set up in the privy so that when the king sat on the seat he triggered it and was killed. Here is the text at ll. 4409–12:

La u cel arc fud aprested
Un nof ostel i ot posed,
Privé hostel l’apeled l’om
Pur cel mestier [i] entrad hom.

⁵⁶ We might have expected among the list of Old English words a native formation with *dēogol* “secret”; but neither OE **dēogolhūs* nor ME **dīzelhous* is attested.

⁵⁷ Note that *prive* itself is cited in Middle English usage from early Middle English onwards and the collocation *prive chaumbre* with the sense “privy” appears in Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle* (as cited in MED s.v. *prive chaumbre* sense (b)). *Privé* was also in common usage in contemporary Continental French with the same collocation and sense; see Tobler-Lommatzsch s.v. *privé*.

Where the bow was set up
 A new building was placed;
 It was called a [*privé-hostel*].
 Men went in there to do their business.⁵⁸

Privé hostel here means “privy” and *run-hus* would thus be an exact English parallel to such a collocation in Anglo-French — “a room for private needs”.

University of Edinburgh

MARGARET LAING

REFERENCES

- AND = *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, Stone, L.W., Rothwell, W. and Reid, T.B.W. (eds.) London: Modern Languages Research Association, 1977–. See now on-line at <http://www.anglo-norman.net/>
- Arngart, O. (ed.) 1955. *The Proverbs of Alfred*, vol. 2. Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup.
- Arngart, O. (ed.) 1968. *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus*. Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup.
- Atkins, J.W.H. (ed.) 1922. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baldinger, K. (ed.) 1997. *Dictionnaire étymologique de l'ancien français*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Benskin, M. 2001. The language of the English texts. In: Hunt, T. (ed) *Three Receptaria from Medieval England* (pp. 193–230). Medium Ævum Monographs NS 21. Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature.
- Bosworth-Toller = Toller T. N. (ed.) 1898 (suppl. 1921). *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*. London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford. Enlarged addenda and corrigenda by Alistair Campbell. 1972. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brown, M.P. 1990. *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600*. London: The British Library.
- Cartlidge, N. 1998. The Linguistic Evidence for the Provenance of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 99: 24968.
- Cartlidge, N. (ed.) 2001. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2001.
- Dobson, E.J. 1961. A new edition of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, [review of Stanley], *Notes and Queries* 206: 373–8, 405–11, 444–8.
- EDD = Wright, J. (ed.) 1902. *The English Dialect Dictionary*. London: Henry Frowde.
- Gadow, W. (ed.) 1909. Das mittenglische Streitgedicht Eule und Nachtigall, *Palaestra* 65.
- Gover, J.E.B., Mawer, A. and Fenton, F.M. (eds.) 1940. *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, English Place-Name Society 17. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grattan, J.H.G. and G.F.H. Sykes (eds.) 1935. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Early English Text Society ES 119. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hesketh, Glynn (ed.) 1996–2000. *La Lumere as Lais*, 3 vols. London: Anglo-Norman Text Society 54–58.
- Holthausen, F. 1934. *Altenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to Philip Bennett for help with the translation.

- Kenyon, J.S. 1913. Notes on *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 12: 572–582.
- Ker, N.R. (ed.) 1963. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Early English Text Society OS 251. London: Oxford University Press.
- LAEME = A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English, eds. M. Laing, R. Lass. In progress.
- Laing, M. 1998. Raising a Stink in *The Owl and the Nightingale*: a New Reading at Line 115, *Notes and Queries* 243: 276–284.
- Laing, M. 1999. Confusion *wrs* confounded: literal substitution sets in early Middle English writing systems. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100: 251–269.
- Laing, M. 2001. Words reread. Middle English Writing Systems and the Dictionary', *Linguistica e Filologia* 13: 87–129.
- Mätzner, E. (ed.) 1867. *Altenglische Sprachproben*. Berlin: Weidmann'sche Buchhandlung.
- MED = *Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Stanley, E.G. (ed.) 1960 (re-issued Manchester, 1972; repr. 1981). *The Owl and the Nightingale*. London and Edinburgh: Nelson.
- Stratmann, F.H.S. (ed.) 1868. *An Old English Poem of the Owl and the Nightingale*. Krefeld: privately printed.
- Tobler-Lommatzsch = *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, Tobler, A. and Lommatzsch, E. (eds.) Berlin: Weidmann, 1925–.
- Waddell, H. 1954. *The Wandering Scholars*. 6th edn. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.
- Wells, J.E. (ed.) 1907. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Boston and London: D.C. Heath and co.

